



Askin, L. (2018). Beyond Encomium or Eulogy: The Role of Simon the High Priest in Ben Sira. *Journal of Ancient Judaism*, 9(3), 344-365.  
<https://doi.org/10.13109/jaju.2018.9.3.344>

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## “Beyond Encomium or Eulogy: The Role of Simon the High Priest in Ben Sira”

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### Introduction

The Book of Ben Sira, also known as the Wisdom of Ben Sira, Ecclesiasticus, or Sirach, is thought to have been written sometime in the first quarter of the second century B.C.E. in Jerusalem, with a last possible date of writing around 175 B.C.E., before the policies of Antiochus IV Epiphanes.<sup>1</sup> This dating range is partly based on the year in the Prologue of the Greek translation by the Greek translator of Ben Sira, who identifies himself as his grandson, and on the modern interpretation that the High Priest Simon, mentioned in Sir 50:1-24, is dead at the time Ben Sira writes. In his book, Ben Sira writes not only wisdom sayings but also psalms and poems on a variety of subjects, including a poem comparing professional trades and scribes (Sir 38-39), and a lengthy poem on Israel’s patriarchs (Sir 44-50).

The Greek translation of Ben Sira (Sirach) offers a witness to an early Hebrew version.<sup>2</sup> It is the work of a grandson of Ben Sira living in Egypt, as stated in the added

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<sup>1</sup> A version of this study was presented at the British Association for Jewish Studies Conference at the University of Birmingham in July 2016. Thanks are due to Dr James K. Aitken for his helpful suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> About two-thirds of the original Hebrew version survives owing to the Hebrew scroll of Ben Sira from Masada (Mas<sup>1b</sup>) and six medieval manuscripts (MS A-F) which come from the genizah of the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Cairo. Other important versions for comparison of the text are in Syriac and Latin (Old Latin incorporated into the Vulgate). For scholarship on the Syriac: M.M. Winter, “The Origins of Ben Sira in Syriac,” *VT* 27 (1977): 237-53; 494-507; M.M. Winter, “Interlopers Reunited: The Early Translators of Ben Sira,” *JBL* 131.2 (2012): 251-69. Latin: S. Edgar, ed., *The Vulgate Bible: Douay-Rheims Translation*, vol. 3, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 2010); B.F. Osb et al., *Biblia Sacra: Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem II Proverbia-Apocalypsis* (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1969); Vattioni compiles a hand edition of the Hebrew, Greek, Syriac, and Latin: Francesco Vattioni, *Ecclesiastico: Testo ebraico con apparato critico e version greca, latina e siriaca* (Pubblicazioni del Seminario de Semitistica 1; Naples: Istituto Orientale di Napoli, 1968). For the Hebrew and Greek, I have consulted: Z. Ben-Hayyim, *ספר בן סירא* (Jerusalem: Academy of Hebrew Language and Shrine of the Book, 1973); M.H. Segal, *ספר בן-סירא השלם* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1958); P.C. Beentjes, *The Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew: A Text Edition of All Extant Hebrew Manuscripts and Synopsis of All Parallel Hebrew Ben Sira Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); R. Smend, *Die Weisheit des Jesus Sirach, hebräisch und deutsch; herausgegeben von Rudolf Smend: mit einem hebräischen Glossar* (3 vols.; Berlin: Reimer, 1906); P.W. Skehan and A.A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* (Anchor Bible 39; New York; London: Doubleday, 1987); J. Ziegler, *Sapientia Iesu Filii Sirach, Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Societatis Litterarum Gottingensis*

Prologue in the Greek (Sir, Prologue). The dating of Ben Sira is thus estimated in part because the Greek translator states that he arrived and “stayed awhile” in Egypt in the thirty-eighth year of the reign of Ptolemy VIII Euergetes, which works out to around 132 B.C.E.<sup>3</sup> He set about writing a Greek translation of the Book of Ben Sira having discovered that there was not one yet available. Most scholars would give a date for the Greek translation soon after 132 B.C.E., as it is difficult to assume that “stayed awhile” equates to years. If the translation was completed a number of years after 132 B.C.E., the translator would have perhaps given a later benchmark for his readers to judge the timeframe of the text’s translation. By suggesting 132 B.C.E., the translator gives an indication to his readers that around 132 B.C.E. or soon after, no Greek version of Ben Sira was available. There is no indication of the Greek translator’s own age or name, and neither is the title of “grandson” a precise indication of age (the occasion of the translator might be anytime in the translator’s life), or perhaps even relationship. Although it may be suggested that the translator is not a blood-relation, the appellation does lay claim to a certain association with the descendants of Ben Sira, and therefore it may not be too far off the mark. “Grandson” might indicate a grand-nephew, a descendent cousin, or even a great-grandson.

The longest poem in the book is called the Praise of the Fathers, Sir 44-50. This Praise poem has long interested scholars, particularly how the poem appears to culminate with Simon II the High Priest in Sir 50:1-24. It has been argued that the Praise of the Fathers ends with Sir 49, and that the lines concerning Simon (Sir 50:1-24) do not form part of the Praise.<sup>4</sup>

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editum XII.2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965); A. Rahlfs and R. Hanhart, eds., *Septuaginta* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Ptolemy VIII Euergetes reign over Egypt stretches from 170 B.C.E. until his death in 113 B.C.E., although he ruled jointly under a triumvirate from 164-144 B.C.E., and during the period of 131-126 B.C.E. he was exiled on Cyprus after rioting in Alexandria.

<sup>4</sup> Skehan and Di Lella, *Ben Sira*, 545. A. Lange, “‘The Law, the Prophets, and the Other Books of the Fathers’ (Sir, Prologue): Canonical Lists in Ben Sira and Elsewhere?” in *Studies in the Book of Ben Sira: Papers of the Third International Conference on the Deuterocanonical Books, Shime’on Centre, Pápa, Hungary, 18-20 May, 2006* (eds. G.G. Xeravits and J. Zsengellér, JSJSup 127; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 55-80; J. Kugel, “*Jubilees*, Philo, and the Problem of Genesis,” in *The Hebrew Bible in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (eds. A. Lange et al., FRLANT 239; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 295-311, 297.

Testing the theory of whether Sir 44-50 is an encomium of Simon, Christopher Rollston questions whether the label of Greek encomium (a composition that praises something) is appropriate for Ben Sira's Praise of the Fathers.<sup>5</sup> Rollston argues that Greek encomia name their subjects throughout, something which is not done in the Praise of the Fathers. This conclusion led to his suggestion that Sir 50 might be read separately from 44-49, and that the term encomium is not suitable for Sir 44-50. However, Thomas R. Lee, Burton L. Mack, Otto Mulder, Georg Sauer, Benjamin G. Wright, James K. Aitken, and Pancratius C. Beentjes understand Simon as the natural climax of the Praise, citing allusions and echoes of the patriarchs' deeds and qualities which run throughout Sir 50.<sup>6</sup>

Scholars differ considerably on whether Sir 44-50 is to be considered separate to the rest of the book, and whether or not the Praise should include Sir 50.<sup>7</sup> These issues aside, the underlying question remains the matter of why Simon is written anywhere into Ben Sira's book in the first place. Even if the Praise of the Fathers cannot be strictly called an encomium on the basis of consistency of explicitly naming a subject throughout the work, we must still account for Ben Sira's concerns to praise Simon in Sir 50.

Working backwards, two generations prior to the year of the completion of the Greek translation in 132 B.C.E. puts the work of Ben Sira within an initial window of around 198 to 175 B.C.E., considering the age of the translator and an earliest possible date (*terminus a*

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<sup>5</sup> C.A. Rollston, "The Non-Encomiastic Features of Ben Sira 44-50" (MA Thesis, Emmanuel School of Religion, 1992).

<sup>6</sup> T.R. Lee, *Studies in the Form of Sirach 44-50* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1986); B.L. Mack, *Wisdom and the Hebrew Epic: Ben Sira's Hymn in Praise of the Fathers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); O. Mulder, *Simon the High Priest in Sirach 50: An Exegetical Study of the Significance of Simon the High Priest as Climax to the Praise of the Fathers in Ben Sira's Concept of the History of Israel* (JSJSup 78; Leiden: Brill, 2003); B.G. Wright, "'Fear the Lord and Honor the Priest': Ben Sira as Defender of the Jerusalem Priesthood," in *Ben Sira in Modern Research: Proceedings of the First International Ben Sira Conference 28-31 July 1996 Soesterberg, Netherlands* (ed. P.C. Beentjes; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997), 189-222; B.G. Wright, "Biblical Interpretation in the Book of Ben Sira," in *A Companion to Biblical Interpretation in Early Judaism* (ed. Matthias Henze; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 363-88; J.K. Aitken, "Biblical Interpretation as Political Manifesto: Ben Sira in His Seleucid Setting," *JJS* 51:2 (2000): 191-208; P.C. Beentjes, ed., *The Book of Ben Sira in Modern Research* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); G. Sauer, *Jesus Sirach/Ben Sira* (Alte Testament deutsch. Apokryphen 1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Mack sees Sir 44-50 as primarily a text of wisdom, that should not be segregated from the rest of the book. Mack, *Wisdom*.

*quo*) of Sir 50 at around 198 B.C.E. owing to the reference to Simon's building works in (Sir 50:2-4), which were completed in that year. Another consideration is whether Ben Sira himself is writing when he is at the end of his career. Considering this matter, it could be suggested that a book which demonstrates his skill and wisdom for both present and future generations, and is intended to attract fame and perhaps future pupils, would not be done only upon retirement. A further terminal date for the Hebrew version is the death of Simon II in 195 B.C.E., or up to a couple of years later as suggested by Otto Mulder.<sup>8</sup> Simon II, whose long tenure as High Priest ran from 220 to c.195 B.C.E., is mentioned in 3 Maccabees 2 in a positive light.<sup>9</sup> Simon II was succeeded by one of his sons, Onias III, who was later replaced by Jason.

It might be questioned, then, whether the year of the death of Simon must necessarily be the year in which Ben Sira was written. Certain arguments cast doubt upon the necessity of the date of Ben Sira's book being the death of Simon. Considering the widespread phenomena of reciprocity and patronage in the ancient world, this study presents the argument that there is considerable space for the idea that Sir 44-50, at least, if not the entire book, might have been composed before 195 B.C.E.

## 1. The Identification of Ben Sira's Simon as Simon II

The idea that Ben Sira's Simon the High Priest was dead at the time of the composition of Sir 50 has prevailed in scholarship for over a century, usually within the larger issue of the identification of Simon the Righteous, who is known only from Josephus and rabbinic

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<sup>8</sup> Mulder, *Simon*, 237.

<sup>9</sup> Mulder, *Simon*, 237. Tropper notes that 3 Maccabees 2, Simon's intercessory prayer, may be an interpolation, A.D. Tropper, *Simeon the Righteous in Rabbinic Literature: A Legend Reinvented* (Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 84; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 201n.

literature.<sup>10</sup> One of the most influential studies written on Simon I and II is that of George Foot Moore on the identification of Simon the Righteous (or Simon the Just).<sup>11</sup> Building a case for identifying Simon the Righteous with Simon I, Moore argues that Josephus and the rabbis conflated Ben Sira's Simon with Simon I on the basis of the glowing terms employed for Ben Sira's Simon. Josephus and the rabbis were, perhaps, also unaware of 3 Maccabees 2, which also places a Simon as high priest during the reign of Ptolemy IV Philopater (221-204 B.C.E.). Moore notes that Ben Sira never gives the Simon of his time the epithet attached to Josephus' Simon the Righteous, and that Josephus' explanation of the epithet is merely a descriptive explanation because he has no other sources on the high priest's life.<sup>12</sup> In total, Josephus says very little about Simon II.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, Josephus' sources for the long period between Alexander the Great and the Hasmonean period are problematic and anachronistic, leading Moore to conclude that Josephus relied on a series of anecdotes rather than dependable historical sources.<sup>14</sup> In his treatment of Ben Sira, Moore identifies Sir 44-49 as a panegyric for Simon, and Sir 50:1-24 as a eulogy of him.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The main rabbinic references of interest are *m. Avot* 1.1, *b. Yoma* 39b, *b. Menahot* 109b. Other rabbinic allusions to Simon the Righteous are *m. Parah* 3.5; *y. Sheqalim* 4.2.48a; *y. Yoma* 1.1.38c, 5.1.42c, 6.3.43c-d; *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* 4; *t. Sotah* 7.13, 13.6, 13.8; *t. Kippurim* 2.13, 13.7; *Sifre Numbers* 22, 131; *Leviticus Rabbah* 21:9, 12; *b. Megillah* 11a; *b. Yoma* 9a, 39a-b, 53b, 69a; *Megillat Ta'anit* according to scholion MS Oxford 20 Adar. For these references see Tropper, *Simeon*.

<sup>11</sup> G. Foot Moore, "Simon the Righteous," in *Jewish Studies in Memory of Israel Abrahams* (ed. G.A. Kohut; New York: Jewish Institute of Religion, 1927), 348-64. Simon the Righteous is also discussed in V. Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* (Philadelphia; New York: Atheneum, 1977), 1:80-81, 437n; E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C. -- A.D. 135)* (Revised ed.; eds. G. Vermes et al.; 3 vols.; London: T&T Clark, 2014), 3.i. See the following for more recent discussions of Simon the Righteous: Skehan and Di Lella, *Ben Sira*, 8-9, 550; J.C. VanderKam, *From Joshua to Caiaphas: High Priests after the Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004); Tropper, *Simeon*.

<sup>12</sup> Josephus explains only that Simon is called Simon the Just because he was a very just leader. Josephus, *Ant.* 12.2, 5 [§43]. Moore, "Simon the Righteous," 362.

<sup>13</sup> The other references offer Simon as a chronological place marker: Josephus, *BJ* 7.10, 2 [§420-425]; *Ant.* 12.4, 10-12.5, 1 [§224-241], 19.6, 2 [§297-298].

<sup>14</sup> Moore, "Simon the Righteous," 357, 360-63. Moore argues that from the end of the Persian (biblical) material until 175 B.C.E., the *Antiquities* is "occupied by lengthy episodes laid—with some salient—anachronisms—in the times of one or another of the kings who ruled in that period." He notes that the access to sources would have been difficult for Josephus considering the seizure of the Temple. It is impressive that for this period, Josephus is entirely preoccupied with romantic anecdotal stories such as the lengthy story of Joseph the tax-farmer, which is anachronistically associated with a Ptolemaic setting although Judea is under Seleucid control (*Ant.* 12.4, 2-10 [§160-227]; compare *Ant.* 12.1 [§1-10]). Moore also notes that the story of Simon meeting Alexander the Great at Antipatris is too close to the story of Jaddus the High Priest (*Ant.* 11.8, 4-5 [§321-339]), the city is anachronistic since Antipatris was named by Herod the Great (compare *BJ* 1.21, 9 [§417]; *Ant.* 16.5, 2

The Simon of Ben Sira is widely regarded as Simon II, and the label of Simon the Righteous is associated with a third-century B.C.E. figure called Simon I, although alternative perspectives are found in James VanderKam and Bernard Barc.<sup>16</sup> However, Ben Sira's Simon might not be the Simon I of the early third century B.C.E., but rather his own contemporary high priest Simon II. Both Simons are sons of Onias and had sons named Onias, and the rabbis' conflation is easy to understand on the basis of Ben Sira's overflowing praise for his High Priest and Josephus's partial information.<sup>17</sup> Moore identifies Simon I with the father of the Onias who founded the temple at Leontopolis.<sup>18</sup> Amram D. Tropper has shown that for the rabbis the Persian period was only thirty-four years long (!), and for the period from Alexander to the Hasmonean period the chronology was incorrect historically but internally consistent for the rabbis.<sup>19</sup> Thus Simon I is best understood as the Simon the

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[§143]), and the meeting place is suspicious since a more natural meeting place would be in the south since Antiochus approached Judea from Arabia (*Ant.* 12.3, 3 [§129-144]; *Ant.* 13.15, 1 [§387-391]), Moore, "Simon the Righteous," 357. The most likely solution is that the Jaddus and Alexander story was reworked with Simon and Antiochus. On Antipatris, Moore is discussing the ideas of Zeitlin. S. Zeitlin, "שמעון הצדיק וכנסת הגדולה," *Ner Maaravi* 2 (1924): 137-42.

<sup>15</sup> Moore, "Simon the Righteous," 353.

<sup>16</sup> VanderKam, *From Joshua to Caiaphas*, 138-57; B. Barc, *Siméon le Juste: L'auteur oublié de la Bible hébraïque* (Judaïsme ancien et origines du christianisme 4; Turnhout: Brepols, 2015). Barc assumes that Simon the Righteous is the same as Simon II on the basis of Ben Sira's portrayal of him in Sir 44-50. VanderKam suggests that Ben Sira's Simon in Sir 50 is Simon I (*From Joshua*, 153), concluding that Sir 50 need not be interpreted as an eyewitness account and that Antiochus III could not have wanted to fortify Jerusalem. Judea was much desired by Ptolemaic Egypt from the third century B.C.E. up to the reign of Herod the Great, and so it does not make sense to leave a contested territory unprotected. Furthermore, Bickerman shows that the Seleucid charter of Antiochus III (Josephus, *Ant.* 12.3, 3 [§138-144]) for the rebuilding of Jerusalem is in keeping with other Hellenistic charters for rebuilding cities devastated by war or natural disasters, and that attention to the local temple was a chief concern of these charters. Bickerman notes that the Josephus' transcription of the letter is in accordance with Seleucid practice even to the leaving out of the regnal year in the ruler-to-ruler copies of such charters. E.J. Bickerman, "The Seleucid Charter of Jerusalem," in *Studies in Jewish and Christian History: A New Edition in English Including The God of the Maccabees* (ed. A.D. Tropper; 2 vols.; Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 68; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 1:315-56. See also E.J. Bickerman, "La charte séleucide de Jérusalem," *REJ* 100 (1935): 4-35. By comparison, Tropper discusses Simon the Righteous as found in rabbinic literature as collected stories and traditions attached to a high priest named Simon slightly before the Hasmoneans. Tropper argues that Josephus was limited in sources on the early Hellenistic period. Tropper, *Simeon*, 199-201.

<sup>17</sup> Tropper, *Simeon*, 208, 214. On the basis of Ben Sira's depiction, Tropper argues that the rabbis assumed that Ben Sira's Simon was a "watershed figure" in history.

<sup>18</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 12.9, 7 [§382-388]; 13.3, 1-4 [§62-79].

<sup>19</sup> Tropper, *Simeon*, 209. Internally, Tropper shows that the least common denominator with which all the rabbinic texts agree is that Simon lived sometime before the Hasmoneans, with the exception of Tos. *Scholion Megillat Ta'anit* 22 Shevat, which dates Simon to the death of Caligula (41 C.E.), which Tropper argues was originally about a different priest and later reworked to be about Simon by someone unaware of the

Righteous of the early third century B.C.E., and Ben Sira's Simon as Simon II. For independent reasons, Ben Sira considered Simon II to be a good leader.

## 2. Sir 44-50 as Encomium

Thomas R. Lee argues that the purpose of the Hymn is to praise the patriarchs as a way of preparing the reader for hearing about the qualities of Simon, as the culmination of the patriarchs. Notably, Lee compares the Praise of the Fathers with the form of the encomium, a position later critiqued by Rollston in his MA thesis.<sup>20</sup> Xenophon's *Agesilaus* (c. 370 B.C.E.) is presented as a good example of an encomium with thematic qualities similar to that of Sir 44-50.<sup>21</sup> Xenophon's encomium of the great Spartan king is long, is written in prose. Some comparison can be attempted partially with the character sketches of figures within his great historical work on the March of the Ten Thousand, the *Anabasis*, written around the same time.<sup>22</sup> Some of the subjects written about are living while others, such as Agesilaus, are recently deceased at the time of composition. Xenophon knew Agesilaus II (c. 440-360 B.C.E.) and respected him greatly. *Agesilaus* fits qualities of both a eulogy (praise of the dead) and an encomium (and praise of a thing—any person, abstract, or idea).

Similarly, Isocrates's *Evagoras* (c. 370 B.C.E.), is written in praise of a Cypriot king Evagoras II, who lived around 411-374 B.C.E. This prose encomium is composed on a funeral occasion as a eulogy that was also an encomium.<sup>23</sup> The art of the encomium became well-known with the works of Pindar (c. 518-440s B.C.E.), who wrote numerous elaborate

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chronological problems. Tropper remarks that if the rabbis had kept creating stories about Simon, he probably would have been living for a considerably long time after the Hellenistic period.

<sup>20</sup> Rollston, "Non-Encomiastic."

<sup>21</sup> Lee, *Studies*.

<sup>22</sup> A. Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 51-52.

<sup>23</sup> Momigliano compares the encomia of Isocrates and Xenophon, Momigliano, *Development*, 49-52; E. Alexiou, *Der Euagoras des Isokrates: ein Kommentar* (Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte 101; Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2010).



odes to living contemporaries, both encomia and epinikia.<sup>24</sup> William H. Race writes that Pindaric encomia and epinikia fell out of fashion by the fourth century B.C.E. (Plato, *Lysis*, 205cd), and had to be “reinvented” by authors such as Isocrates, who were well-acquainted with the qualities of encomia such as structure, theme, and intention.<sup>25</sup>

There are few strict rules to an encomium, except that it must be a praise of *something*. In this respect, there might not be a problem with classifying Ben Sira’s praise of Simon as an encomium in the broadest cross-cultural sense. To be more precise, however, there are heuristic challenges in calling Sir 44-50 an encomium when it is not written in Greek and does not quote or allude to well-known Greek encomia in language or structure, as for example the fourth-century B.C.E. Greek encomia interpret and reinvent Pindaric odes. The lack of an explicit mention of Simon before Sir 50 is only somewhat resolved by the suggestion that allusions to the virtues and qualities in Sir 44-49 point towards Simon in Sir 50 as its natural climax. Certainly, Sir 50 forms a thematic and chronologically-sound resolution for the allusions and echoes of noble persons in the Praise of the Fathers, particularly in Sir 44:1-15). Beginning with the motivationally suggestive phrase, “Let us now praise men of piety” (Sir 44:1), Ben Sira hints that by Sir 50, the greatest of these is deservedly, and chronologically, Simon.<sup>26</sup>

In terms of frameworks of “praise” genre, Ben Sira takes as his paradigm, more carefully and precisely, laudatory Hebrew psalms such as Psalms 105 and 106, which enumerate the several famous patriarchs and events of Israel’s history. In the simplest terms, if we cannot justify calling Pindar’s *Pythian Odes* psalms, then we should resist superimposing the term encomium onto Sir 44-50. To hold together works such as Sir 44-50

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<sup>24</sup> W.H. Race, “Pindaric Encomium and Isocrates’ *Evagoras*,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 117 (1987): 131-55.

<sup>25</sup> Race, “Pindaric,” 131, 154-55.

<sup>26</sup> Hebrew: אהללה נא אנשי חסד. Greek: αἰνέσωμεν δὴ ἀνδρας ἐνδόξους.

and Isocrates's *Evagoras* or Xenophon's *Agésilas*, a more suitable term, sensitive to differences in language, form, and cultural contexts, might be laudatory literature.

### 3. Sir 44-50 as Eulogy

This question of whether Simon II is alive or dead at the time of writing is pertinent to matters of dating and context. If Simon is in fact alive, then the dating of Sir 50, even the whole book of Ben Sira, could be pushed back to before 195 B.C.E. If Simon is dead, however, the window is pushed to after 195 B.C.E.<sup>27</sup> If Ben Sira is someone who taught in his own school—a member of the middle or professional class, with strong links to the priesthood,<sup>28</sup> then we might be permitted to speculate about what events of his life, or what situation, granted him the time to write a very long and thoughtful book of fifty chapters.<sup>29</sup> Such a picture necessitates comparison with the situations of other ancient writers in the ancient Mediterranean.

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<sup>27</sup> Marböck and Wright have also suggested that the political turmoil which followed the death of Simon II should be understood as the context of Sir 35:14-26, a nationalistic prayer. However, my argument suggests that Simon could still be alive, and therefore the nationalistic prayer and defence of the poor in Sir 36 might perhaps be more relevant to the struggles of war which were endured by Jerusalem over the third century B.C.E., which resulted in depopulation of the city and the need for financial support and subsidies from the Seleucids. Marböck suggests the Heliodorus incident of 2 Maccabees 3. J. Marböck, "Das Gebet um die Rettung ben Siras," in *Memoria Jerusalem. Freundesgabe Franz Sauer* (eds. J.B. Bauer and Johannes Marböck; Graz, Austria: Akademisches Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt, 1977), 93-115, 105. B.G. Wright "'Put the Nations in Fear of You': Ben Sira and the Problem of Foreign Rule," in *Praise Israel from Wisdom and Instruction: Essays on Ben Sira and Wisdom, the Letter of Aristeas and the Septuagint* (JSJSup 131; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 126-46, 144. Bradley Gregory has related the themes of defending the poor to the nationalistic prayer. B.C. Gregory, "The Relationship between the Poor in Judea and Israel under Foreign Rule: Sirach 35:14-26 among Second Temple Prayers and Hymns," *JSJ* 42:3 (2011): 311-27.

<sup>28</sup> C.V. Camp, "Honor and Shame in Ben Sira: Anthropological and Theological Reflections," in *The Book of Ben Sira in Modern Research Proceedings of the First International Ben Sira Conference, 28-31 July 1996 Soesterberg, Netherlands* (BZAW 255; Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 1997), 171-88; S.M. Olyan, "Ben Sira's Relationship to the Priesthood," *HTR* 80:3 (1987): 261-86; Aitken, "Biblical Interpretation."

<sup>29</sup> But we must be careful not to think Ben Sira is a typical scribe. Ben Sira is clearly not typical, being of the enviable status of having been a court advisor, travelled extensively, and having composed a well-written book. He is not an ordinary administrative worker or copyist; he is closer to the Greek-Jewish dramatists and historians such as Aristobulus, Ezekiel the Tragedian, or Eupolemus. For these Greek-Jewish writers, see C.R. Holladay, ed., *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors* (4 vols.; Texts and Translations, Pseudepigrapha Series 20; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983).

The Praise of the Fathers, indeed the whole book, therefore presents intriguing questions concerning the long-acknowledged relationship between Ben Sira and Simon. Therefore, Simon's mortal status (living or dead) could perhaps provide some clues about the role Simon played in the physical creation of Ben Sira's book.

The main problem of why we think Simon is dead is a central issue for interpreting the text itself as well as its provenance. In order to approach this problem, comparative historical evidence will be assessed in the second half of this article. We will consider passages from Ben Sira's text itself, as well as comparative evidence of the Second Temple, Greek, and Roman examples of patronage or friendship/reciprocity. The Greek and Roman evidence is useful as a contemporary historical context, since Ben Sira lived within a Mediterranean society which during his lifetime ruled by two major Hellenistic empires, Ptolemaic Egypt and Seleucid Syria.<sup>30</sup>

### *i. Eulogy and Death in Ben Sira*

The first passage we will look at is Sir 50:1-24. The first line of Sir 50 reads, "Great among his brothers and the glory of his people is Simon son of Onias, the Priest."<sup>31</sup> The Greek

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<sup>30</sup> For details of Ptolemaic administration in Judea see E.J. Bickerman, *The Jews in the Greek Age* (London/Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 72-80. For Ben Sira as anti-Hellenistic see Skehan and Di Lella, *Ben Sira*; A.A. Di Lella, "Conservative and Progressive Theology: Sirach and Wisdom," *CBQ* 28 (1966): 139-54; Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization*, 144-45; M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism* (2 vols.; London: SCM Press, 1974), 1:243, 258; Himmelfarb says that the search for Ben Sira's anti-Hellenism is misguided and we should orient our search towards cultural setting. M. Himmelfarb, "Elias Bickerman on Judaism and Hellenism," in *The Jewish Past Revisited: Reflections on Modern Jewish Historians* (eds. D.N. Meyers and D.B. Ruderman; London/New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998). For an appraisal of this see L.A. Askin, *Scribal Culture in Ben Sira* (JSJSup 184; Leiden: Brill, 2018).

<sup>31</sup> All translations of Ben Sira are the author's own unless otherwise stated. Hebrew Sir 50:1: גדול אחיו ותפארת (MS B). This opening is similar to other lines in the Praise of the Fathers, and together with the repetition of תפארת from the previous line Sir 49:16, lends credence to the idea that Simon is another subject of praise in a long line of honourable patriarchs. J.K. Aitken, "The Semantics of 'Glory' in Ben Sira—Traces of a Development in Post-Biblical Hebrew?" in *Sirach, Scrolls, and Sages: Proceedings of a Second International Symposium on the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Ben Sira, and the Mishnah, Held at Leiden University, 15-17 December 1997* (eds. T. Muraoka and J.F. Elwolde, STDJ 33; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 1-24.

Sirach begins simply with Simon's name (Sir 50:1 Gr).<sup>32</sup> The poem, regardless of whether it continues from Sir 44-49, is concerned with a Simon who is a High Priest, deserving of exuberant praise for his excellence as a leader of his people.

Although it is by far not a universal conclusion among scholars that Sir 44-50 or Sir 50 should be called a eulogy, most interpretations of this poem work under the assumption that Simon is probably dead at the time of composition. The same issues of misappellation of genres across cultural boundaries do apply. A funeral eulogy is a poem praising the life of a dead person and mourning their passing. Alexander Di Lella calls Sir 50 a panegyric, separate from the Praise of the Fathers.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless Di Lella argues that on the basis of the phrases "in his time" and especially in the Greek "in his life," Sir 50 is a panegyric of the deceased – a eulogy.<sup>34</sup> He argues this is clearer in the Greek, which reads: ἐν ζωῇ αὐτοῦ. This is too loose an application of the genre label since panegyrics are 1) speeches rather than poetry and 2) they are usually addressed to living people. In the Greek and Roman period, panegyric speeches were delivered for public events.<sup>35</sup> For example, Roman imperial panegyrics frequently made comparisons with exemplary figures of the past as a way of glorifying the present emperor.<sup>36</sup> As discussed, encomium can be addressed to the living, dead, or figures from mythology and deities, as well as abstract ideas or things.<sup>37</sup> What defines an encomium

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Aitken has noted how the terms for glory, תפארת and התפארת, are particularly associated in Ben Sira's exegesis with the priesthood, while כבוד can be used of humans or the divine presence.

<sup>32</sup> ΣΙΜΩΝ Ὀνόλου υἱὸς ἱερεὺς ὁ μέγας, ὃς ἐν ζωῇ αὐτοῦ ὑπέρραψεν οἶκον καὶ ἐν ἡμέραις αὐτοῦ ἐστερέωσε τὸν ναόν·.

<sup>33</sup> Skehan and Di Lella, *Ben Sira*, 550.

<sup>34</sup> Skehan and Di Lella, *Ben Sira*, 550. For them the poem sub-unit is Sir 50:1-21 and seen as separate from the Praise of the Fathers. Skehan and Di Lella, *Ben Sira*, 545. By comparison, Moore retained the distinction between panegyric (Sir 44-49) and eulogy (Sir 50). Moore, "Simon the Righteous," 353.

<sup>35</sup> Cicero, *Orat.* 37. Quintilian, *Inst.* 3.4.14.

<sup>36</sup> L. Cordes, "Si te nostra tulissent saecula: Comparison with the Past as a Means of Glorifying the Present in Domitianic Panegyric," in *Valuing the Past in the Greco-Roman World: Proceedings from the Penn-Leiden Colloquia on Ancient Values VII* (eds. J. Ker and C. Pieper, Mnemosyne Supplements 369; Leiden: Brill, 2014), 294-325.

<sup>37</sup> For panegyric speeches and encomia, see the excellent discussions in C. Pepe, *The Genres of Rhetorical Speeches in Greek and Roman Antiquity* (International Studies in the History of Rhetoric 5; Leiden: Brill, 2013). Examples of panegyric speeches include Isocrates *Panegyricus* (on Athens) and the (Roman) panegyric orations of Aelius Aristides. Examples of encomia in Greek include: Callimachus, *Hymn to Delos*; Theocritus, *Encomium to Ptolemy Philadelphus*; Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen*; Demosthenes xviii 215; Plato, *Symp.* 194E-

is the celebration of virtues of the subject, and attention to past and present. Mack argues that because Sir 44-50 contains elements of genealogy and pointing to the past (Sir 44-49) to make a point about Simon's deeds in Sir 50, Sir 44-50 is an encomium, but one which goes further than the genre and contains a larger purpose of narrating history which is larger than Simon.<sup>38</sup>

In the Hebrew and Greek versions of Sir 50, the past tense is indeed clear in the verbs, but there is no register-shift from present to past here to demarcate that the past tense in this case is particularly meaningful. As a matter of course, the Hebrew of Ben Sira is normally in the perfect (qal). Furthermore, the vivid descriptions of Simon conducting his priestly work in his beautiful priestly robes, and the phrases "in his generation" and "among his brothers" serve to bring the reader closer into the present, when Simon is greatest of his peers. In his study of Sir 50, Mulder translates the whole poem into the present tense for literary effect, for example with Sir 50:4-5, "It is he who takes care of his people against robbery, and he makes his city stronger than the enemy. How glorious is he when he looks out of the tent, and comes out of the house of the veil."<sup>39</sup>

Finally, if Sir 50 can be a eulogy in any sense, it is unreflecting of death completely. Elsewhere when Ben Sira writes of death he does so directly, without embarrassment (e.g. Sir 38:16-23; Sir 41:1-14). Ben Sira's book contains plenty of advice about death, with consolation for the living as a prominent theme. Interestingly his advice to mourners (Sir 38:16-18) are to conduct the burial and weep appropriately (no more than one or two days)—there is no advice on how to speak about the dead, or how to give a suitable eulogy.

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197E; Xenophon, *Agésilaios*. See also Lee, *Studies*. For encomia as part of the *progymnasmata* curriculum, see Quint., *Inst.* 3.7, 8.4; Cicero, *De invent.* 2.177-78; Cicero, *De Orat.* 2.341-48; Aristotle, *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* 3 and 35; Hermogenes of Tarsus, *Hermogenis Opera* 14-18, Theon, *Rhetores* 1.227-31. An example of a second or third century C.E. student's encomium is P.Oxy 5194, "Encomium of the Logos." See W.B. Henry and P.J. Parsons, eds., *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri. Volume LXXIX, [N° 5183-5218]* (Graeco-Roman Memoirs 100; London: Egypt Exploration Society, 2014), 79-88.

<sup>38</sup> Mack, *Wisdom*, 134-37.

<sup>39</sup> Mulder, *Simon*, 259-61.

Throughout Sir 50, there is no discussion of death. By comparison, Greek and Roman funerary orations not only honour the dead and acknowledge their deeds and their passing, but one of their chief aims is to give consolation to the living—they are not just praises of deeds. The lamentation is integral to the genre, and culturally integral for both collective and individual grief, while praises of deeds serve as inspiration for the living to be courageous.<sup>40</sup> Therefore if Sir 50:1-24 is to be seen as a eulogy in praise of the dead, it is odd that we do not get more of a sense of death and loss throughout this poem. There is not a single lamentation upon the death of Simon anywhere in Sir 50. Regardless of whether Sir 44-50, or Sir 50 alone, might be classified as an encomium, in the case of eulogy, the appellation of eulogy presents insufficient evidence. While it might be questioned how the features of Greek and Roman funeral orations might be relevant here within the frameworks of cultural analogy, the main point of interest is to address and challenge previous scholarly evocations of Greco-Roman eulogy as an acceptable label for Sir 50. The theory of Sir 50, or Sir 44-50, as a eulogy to Simon, seems to create more challenges than it resolves.

## *ii. Simon's Building Works in Sir 50*

The infrastructure works of Simon in Sir 50:1-4 mention the strengthening of the Temple (Sir 50:1), fortification of the Temple wall (Sir 50:2), the building of a water cistern (Sir 50:3), and finally states that Simon saved his people from ruin and fortified the city to withstand siege (Sir 50:4). These fortifications and improvements happened shortly after the summer of

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<sup>40</sup> For a good discussion of Greek and Roman eulogy, see: D.J. Ochs, *Consolatory Rhetoric: Grief, Symbol, and Ritual in the Greco-Roman Era* (Studies in rhetoric/communication; Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 73. See also J.M.C. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World* (London/Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996). Six Greek *epitaphios* survive: Pericles in Thucydides, the funerary orations of Lysias and Gorgias, Plato's *Menexenus* (a parody oration), and Hyperides (the only one probably delivered before an audience). Ochs, *Consolatory*, 68. Roman orations are described by Polybius, *Hist.* 6.53-54, and by Cicero (*Pro Milone* 13.33, *de Oratore* 2.84). Ochs writes that in Roman funeral orations, it was vital for morale to address consolation so that others would be inspired to bravery, *Consolatory*, 93.

200 B.C.E. when Antiochus III Epiphanes finally regained control of Jerusalem from Ptolemaic Egypt, and the works are enumerated in the Seleucid charter recorded in Josephus.<sup>41</sup> These building works seem to be similar to other post-disaster infrastructure improvements and provisions such as food and tax relief made during the Hellenistic period. Some examples are Lysimachia in Thrace, rebuilt by Antiochus III Epiphanes in 195 B.C.E. after the city had been destroyed by barbarians.<sup>42</sup> Other examples are an unnamed Seleucid city in Asia Minor in 188 B.C.E. and the city of Telmessus in Lycia by Ptolemy son of Lysimachus in 240 B.C.E.<sup>43</sup> Telmessus was repaired from severe war damage and given three years of tax exemption, and the city in Asia Minor enjoyed renewed subsidies, five years of tax exemption, barley and food, oil for the gymnasium, land gifts, and the renewal of ancestral laws.<sup>44</sup>

The Greek administrative vocabulary for this type of financial gift is *σύνταξις*, which means a king's gift or contribution given to subjects, or the contribution due to the king.<sup>45</sup> As offered by the Seleucid charter, the improvements to Jerusalem came from Seleucid imperial finance. Aitken has argued how by praising these building works, Ben Sira in effect praises not only Simon but also the ruling Seleucid authority necessary to finance such building.<sup>46</sup> In a similar way, Ben Sira praises the *σύνταξις* patronage of Seleucid authority in making post-war improvements to the Temple and the city. Thus, if Aitken is correct, the building works of Sir 50:1-4 might also be interpreted as Ben Sira's awareness of patronage on the scale of governed cities during the Hellenistic period. Despite this, the building works do not have a bearing on whether Simon is alive or dead at the time of writing, since Ben Sira could have

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<sup>41</sup> Bickerman, "Seleucid Charter," 322. Josephus, *Ant.* 12.3, 3 [§138-144]. Josephus' recording of the charter between Antiochus and Ptolemy mentions efforts to re-populate the city after it was decimated by war through gifts of silver, animals, flour, wheat, and salt, sacrificial ingredients, and the repair of the Temple and renewal of ancestral laws.

<sup>42</sup> Mentioned in Appian, *Syr.* 1. Bickerman, "The Seleucid Charter of Jerusalem," 322.

<sup>43</sup> Bickerman, "Seleucid Charter," 327; 354.

<sup>44</sup> Bickerman, "Seleucid Charter," 327-28; 354.

<sup>45</sup> Bickerman, "Seleucid Charter," 323; 354.

<sup>46</sup> Aitken, "Biblical Interpretation."

just as easily written about the works after his death. Instead, Simon's building works should be viewed as an example of Seleucid patronage, and as a *terminus a quo* for Sir 50.

### *iii. Social Relationships in Ben Sira*

Ben Sira has a great deal to say on the practicalities of navigating the social networks of his times, namely how to make the most of reciprocal friendships—in the Mediterranean sense, informally binding relationships of exchange between individuals who are not related. Ben Sira's views on friendship have been explored exegetically through a volume edited by Friedrich Reiterer and studies by Jeremy Corley.<sup>47</sup>

Recently Seth Schwartz has pinpointed the Mediterranean context of Ben Sira's views on friendship through a social historical lens.<sup>48</sup> Schwartz writes that "reciprocity is a near-constant theme" in Ben Sira, drawing attention especially to what amounts to a methodological justification for the existence of reciprocity, in Sir 16:24-17:23.<sup>49</sup> Where Ben Sira offers caution regarding reciprocity, he does so in a way that does not reject the practice but rather instructs on how to use it safely to one's own advantage.<sup>50</sup> Like the Greeks, for example Plato, Ben Sira tries to integrate and guide together the two social models of reciprocity and social solidarity—the ancient Mediterranean world needed and encouraged the balance of both to maintain social order.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> F.V. Reiterer, ed., *Freundschaft bei Ben Sira: Beiträge des Symposions zu Ben Sira, Salzburg 1995* (BZAW 244; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996); J. Corley, *Ben Sira's Teaching on Friendship* (Brown Judaic Studies 316; Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2002); J. Corley, "Friendship in Ben Sira," in *Der Einzelne und seine Gemeinschaft bei Ben Sira* (eds. R. Egger-Wenzel and I. Krammer, BZAW 270; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), 65-72.

<sup>48</sup> S. Schwartz, *Were the Jews a Mediterranean Society? Reciprocity and Solidarity in Ancient Judaism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

<sup>49</sup> Schwartz, *Were the Jews*, 48, 49-54.

<sup>50</sup> Where Ben Sira is cautious of ill-advised reciprocity, see Sir 3:17-22, 5:1-7, 7:4-6, 15:27, 21:14, 32(35):10-17.

<sup>51</sup> Schwartz, *Were the Jews*, 14-18, 63-64. Schwartz writes that the main tool of solidarity in the Torah is charity, and that the Hebrew Bible both recognizes and operates within the system of reciprocity (e.g. Genesis



Richard Horsley has noted that patronage was part of the scribal life.<sup>52</sup> He refers specifically to Sir 4:7 and 13:9, in which Ben Sira advises his readers to be careful with the powerful. Sir 4:7 reads, “Make yourself beloved in the congregation and bow your head low to a governor.”<sup>53</sup> Even more directly, Sir 13:9 advises, “When approaching a noble (נדיב), be reserved; and he will invite you more often.”<sup>54</sup> The same line of thought continues in Sir 13:10-11, in which the reader is advised not to be too distant or too pushy, nor to treat the noble/grandee as your equal. Ben Sira cautions that a powerful man is constantly analysing and testing one’s value to himself. Such advice is given because his readers at potential scribes would be dependent on the ruling class and wealthy for their salaries.

In other passages, Ben Sira conflates piety and wisdom with skilful navigation of the system of reciprocity (Sir 12:1-6, 18:15-18, 20:13-17). Sir 12:2 reads, “Do good to a righteous man, and you will find recompense (ומצא תשלומת)—if not by him certainly by the Most High.”<sup>55</sup> Thus he even extends this relationship of reciprocity to the human with the divine, in Sir 32(35):13 God is called the God of Just Reward (כי אלוה תשלומות הוא).

Schwartz translates the title of God here as “God of Reciprocity.”<sup>56</sup> Other passages concern how to govern relationships within society at large. Sir 7-8 covers specific types of relationships which one encounters in life (Sir 7) and those through which one must steer oneself wisely (Sir 8).

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23). In Plato (*Republic*), for example, or later in the Greco-Roman era, it is patriotism that spurs social cohesion from the ground up, while the dominant system of reciprocity maintains order from the top downwards.

<sup>52</sup> R.A. Horsley, *Revolt of the Scribes: Resistance and Apocalyptic Origins* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2010), 12.

<sup>53</sup> האהב לנפשך לעדה ולשלטון עוד הכאף ראש (MS A). The word שלטון is Aramaic. The Greek reads μεγαίσταν (grandee), cf. Sir 10:24; Dan 5:23.

<sup>54</sup> קרב נדיב היה רחוק וכדי כן גישך (MS A). Greek is δυνάστης.

<sup>55</sup> היטב לצדיק ומצא תשלומת אם לא ממנו מיי (MS A). The Greek here for תשלומת is ἀνταπόδομα (repayment, requital, cf. Sir 14:6).

<sup>56</sup> Schwartz, *Were the Jews*, 63. In the Hebrew version (MS B), this is chapter 32, but Greek swaps the order of Sir 32 and 35.

Perhaps one overlooked topic concerning relations and social networking is Ben Sira's advice on being a scribe. For example, following several lines contrasting the endless physical labour of craftsmen with the opportunities of the scribe, Sir 38:4 is normally interpreted as a suggestion that scribes have plenty of leisure time, or perhaps that only those from wealthy families can become scribes.

: חכמת סופר תרבה חכמה | וחסר עסק הוא יתחכם (MS B)

The scribe's wisdom increases [human] wisdom | And he who lacks a trade will become wise.<sup>57</sup>

Σοφία γραμματέως ἐν εὐκαιρία σχολῆς, καὶ ὁ ἐλασσούμενος πράξει αὐτοῦ σοφισθήσεται.

The wisdom of the grammateus lies in the timely opportunity of leisure | And he who is reduced of business will be wise.

There might, however, be even more nuance within this passage. In both the Hebrew and Greek, the graded parallelism in the bicola progresses the thought from the scribe who has more wisdom being the scribe who is reduced of business. The comparison implies that some scribes do not have enough time free from duties, while other scribes have less burdensome work and more time for wisdom. In consideration of terms, we should emphasize that חסר עסק הוא (and more clearly in ὁ ἐλασσούμενος πράξει) does not imply a person enjoying idle leisure, but a lack of laboursome work that distracts one from gaining *wisdom*. The reduction of workload, for Ben Sira, provides the opportunity for the scribe to

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<sup>57</sup> Compare Skehan and Di Lella, *Ben Sira*, 445; W.J. Houston, "The Scribe and His Class: Ben Sira on Rich and Poor," in *Writing the Bible: Scribes, Scribalism and Script* (eds. T. Römer and P.R. Davies; Durham: Acumen, 2013), 108-123. Skehan and Di Lella, *Ben Sira*, 445, emphasize that the Greek version implies one needs lots of free time in one's life generally, rather than in opportune times.

increase earthly wisdom through a chance to be relieved of administrative or bureaucratic duties. While it is circumstantial to Ben Sira's own situation, and an "autobiographical" interpretation would be certainly amiss, the verse might be interesting to reflect upon in the context of patronage. Ben Sira could suggest that scribes benefit from less duties, depending upon their patron, or that well-connected scribes have greater opportunities to develop and grow in wisdom and learning, than those scribes who are employed in more menial positions.

Reflecting on these passages and the evidence of Sir 50, the case becomes clear that Ben Sira writes as one who is conscious and mindful of his own place in the world and how he might advance himself wisely and strategically, a man who employs and promotes skills which are today called game theory (by which it is simply meant, the study of how humans make decisions and react to things) or Machiavellian principles of self-interest and calculation, in his daily social activity. These traits of strategy and self-interest are paramount in the ancient Mediterranean world which was ruled by reciprocity (that is, a gift economy), which as Schwartz reminds us, is the dominant expression of social power characteristic of premodern societies.<sup>58</sup>

#### **4. Patronage in the Ancient Mediterranean**

A working definition of patronage in the ancient Mediterranean sense is any non-familial relationship which is asymmetrical (one superior, the other of lesser standing), long-lasting even across generations, and is an exchange of services for goods or protection.<sup>59</sup> In the

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<sup>58</sup> Schwartz, *Were the Jews*, 12, 24. R.A. Horsley and P.A. Tiller, "Ben Sira and the Sociology of the Second Temple," in *Second Temple Studies III: Studies in Politics, Class, and Material Culture* (eds. P.R. Davies and J.M. Halligan, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 340; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 74-107, note that Ben Sira's sociological picture of princes and other authorities remains incomplete but useful. Schwartz notes that all the authorities mentioned in Ben Sira are local, not imperial, which reflects the weak-state of the Roman Empire.

<sup>59</sup> A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Patronage in Ancient Society* (Leicester-Nottingham Studies in Ancient Society 1; London: Routledge, 1989).

ancient Near East, this relationship was bound by legal definition but by the Greek and Roman period, the relationship has become informal, but remained the default mechanism for friendship. While it is noted that Roman patronage was increasingly formalized, the Greek and Roman evidence is still relevant for the historical context of Ben Sira since he was a Mediterranean Jewish author living firmly within the Hellenistic period.

The Hebrew concept of covenant reflects this ancient Near Eastern meaning of friendship as a long-term contractual agreement between two people who are not married or related. In Ben Sira, friends are not contractual partners but resemble the Greek and Roman meaning of an informal long-lasting partnership based on mutual exchanges.<sup>60</sup> On a grand scale Romans employ reciprocity, or the gift economy, strategically as had others in the past, to make local leaders beholden to themselves with gifts and benefaction in exchange for their loyalty, something which is certainly the case of Herod the Great with Mark Antony and Augustus.<sup>61</sup> As seen earlier, the Hellenistic system of *συνταξίς* and the repairing of Jerusalem in 200/198 B.C.E. by Antiochus III also fits within this framework: such benefaction is expected to be met with loyalty towards the ruler. On a smaller scale, patronage was employed between individuals for services such as burial sites, buildings, art, literature, and craftsmanship, in the form of public works by individuals of local communities, or even in the form of intellectual apprenticeships between people of the same social standing.<sup>62</sup>

Peter Marshall Fraser writes that most of Alexandrian intellectual production was through patronage.<sup>63</sup> One of the most well known literary patrons is Ptolemy II, who set up the library of Alexandria.<sup>64</sup> The Ptolemies supported both the patronage of individual writers

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<sup>60</sup> Schwartz suggests that Sir 4:10 might actually advise making the poor dependent on you for your own benefit. Schwartz, *Were the Jews*, 66.

<sup>61</sup> P. Richardson, *Herod: King of the Jews and Friend of the Romans* (Studies on Personalities of the New Testament; Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1996).

<sup>62</sup> P. Lowell Bowditch, *Horace and the Gift Economy of Patronage* (The Joan Palevsky Imprint in Classical Literature; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Patronage*; B.K. Gold, *Literary Patronage in Greece and Rome* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987).

<sup>63</sup> P. Marshall Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (3 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 305.

<sup>64</sup> Gold, *Literary Patronage*, 33-34.

as well as funding the Museon of Alexandria, to the extent that many of the Ptolemies themselves engaged in their own literary works.<sup>65</sup> Some of these individuals were brought to Alexandria from afar: Eratosthenes of Cyrene was invited to Alexandria by Ptolemy Euergetes I, and from obscure backgrounds, as in the case of Callimachus who came to Alexandria under either Ptolemy Soter or Philadelphus from Eleusis, a suburb of Alexandria.<sup>66</sup> During the second century B.C.E., a financially difficult period, the Museon was the only major recipient of royal patronage. We could compare this situation to the period of stabilization and prosperity following Antiochus III Epihanes' final acquisition of Jerusalem in 200 B.C.E., which could present better circumstances for the financing of a text than would a period of war or economic contraction.

Seleucid patronage fell far below in reputation for literary and scientific patronage in comparison to the intellectually-minded Ptolemies or Attalid Pergamum.<sup>67</sup> As noted above, Seleucid patronage of cities included Jerusalem and Lysimachia. In the Roman period, patronage also extended occasionally to physicians, as in the case of Galen as the doctor of Marcus Aurelius and Commodus.<sup>68</sup>

When writing a dedication, Fraser argues that most writers were obliged to dedicate their works to their patrons, although in a few cases the dedication appears to be merely an act of homage and respect. This might be a situation where the relationship between the author and dedicated person is unknown but a patronage relationship is actively sought by the writer (see Sir 13:9).<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Fraser mentions the characteristic Ptolemaic concern for literary culture and prestige Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:311.

<sup>66</sup> Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:308.

<sup>67</sup> M. Austin, "Seleucids," *Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece*, 651-52; E.R. Bevan, *The House of Seleucus* (2 vols.; London: Arnold, 1902); E.J. Bickerman, *Institutions des Séleucides* (Paris: Geuthner, 1938).

<sup>68</sup> V. Nutton, *Ancient Medicine* (London: Routledge, 2004); H. King, *Greek and Roman Medicine* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2001).

<sup>69</sup> Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 1:311-12.

Some Greek and Roman writers refer to their patrons explicitly, such as Pindar, whose patrons individually commissioned odes from him.<sup>70</sup> Other writers subtly allude to the relationship, as in Horace, or indirectly we know of them through their letters such as the case with Cicero (*Amic.* 8.26-9.32, especially 9.30; *Epistulae ad Atticum*) or Catullus, who had at least three patrons but never mentions them by name.<sup>71</sup> Bowditch writes of Horace that he wanted to conceal the economic reasons for his patronage, so that his patronage by Maecenas reveals itself in other ways, occasional allusion, rebellious humour, and carefully calculated opinions that are politically sensitive.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, Josephus, for example, became a client of the Flavians and employs carefully formed opinions. Horace and Josephus were both imperial clients, expected to be aligned with the causes of their political patrons.

While it is impossible to determine if Ben Sira's book was composed and drafted in one stage, rather than being a compilation over many years, we might suggest that in the final form in which the Hebrew text is presented to us, there is a clear self-identification of Ben Sira with certain conventions of authorship in the Greco-Roman period: namely, the presentation of his book finally as a whole. Like other authors of his time in the ancient Mediterranean, the book's presentation might be said to include a "nod" towards Simon within the context of a reciprocal relationship of some kind. Whether he would have been the first Jewish author to dedicate his work cannot be known for certain, either. Ben Sira may not be the first extant Jewish author to identify his own name, as it is commonly claimed, since his work does not pre-date Greek-Jewish authors writing in Greek of which we have only fragments—including their names.<sup>73</sup> Of the whole of antique Jewish literature outside the

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<sup>70</sup> Gold, *Literary Patronage*, 21-33.

<sup>71</sup> Gold, *Literary Patronage*, 55-56. These three were probably Cornelius Nepos, Gaius Memmius, and his *patrona virgo* (his muse). Gold writes that Catullus gained entry to this world from Verona because his father had once entertained Julius Caesar when he was governor. Gold, *Literary Patronage*, 55. Catullus 29, 43:5-6, 54, 57, 93; Suetonius *Iul.* 73.

<sup>72</sup> Bowditch, *Horace*, 6, 19.

<sup>73</sup> Holladay, *Fragments*.

Hebrew canon, we are left today with a small proportion that has survived the dual tests of time and transmission.

Building on this context, regarding Simon as patron of Ben Sira becomes more plausible. In light of Greek and Roman efforts to use literature as a means of praising individual patrons, and the lack of any lamentation or consolation advice in Sir 50, we might possibly interpret the poem of Simon in Sir 50, as praise of a living patron coming from a client, an explicit attempt to name Ben Sira's patron. While it would be unwarranted to suggest that Ben Sira's relationship with Simon be identified exactly with the precise formalized Greek and Roman system, the environment of patronage and reciprocity provides a better explanation of Ben Sira's praise of the high priest.

## 5. Patronage in Second Temple Judaism

### *i. Tobias in the Zenon Archive*

Slightly earlier than Ben Sira, Joseph son of Tobias is found in the Zenon papyri.<sup>74</sup> The first letter, given by Tobias' agent Nikanor, details the sale of a slave girl, Sphragis, to Zenon on behalf of Apollonius from April-May 259 B.C.E. (*P. Edgar* 3 = PCZ 59003). In a later letter dated 12 May 257 B.C.E., Tobias writes to Apollonius making him aware of a letter he is sending to Ptolemy which enumerates gifts he is sending the king (*P. Edgar* 84 = PCZ 59076), and in another letter of the same date he acknowledges Apollonius's request for some

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<sup>74</sup> CPJ I.1.1, 4, 5. For Joseph son of Tobias in the Zenon archive, see V. Tcherikover, *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Published for the Magnes Press, Hebrew University by Harvard University Press, 1957); X. Durand, *Des Grecs En Palestine Au III<sup>e</sup> Siècle Avant Jésus-Christ: Le Dossier Syrien Des Archives de Zénon de Caunos (261-252)* (Cahiers de La Revue Biblique 38; Paris: Gabalda et C<sup>ie</sup> Editeurs, 1997); C.C. Edgar, *Zenon Papyri in the University of Michigan Collection* (University of Michigan Studies - Humanistic Series 24; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1931); W.L. Westermann, *Zenon Papyri: Business Papers of the Third Century B.C. Dealing with Palestine and Egypt* (2 vols.; Columbia Papyri - Greek Series 3-4; New York: Columbia University Press, 1934).

animals (*P. Edgar* 13 = PCZ 59075). Each letter has a written acknowledgment on behalf of Apollonius. These three cases illuminate how Tobias, as a local grandee, develops and actively strengthens a relationship of reciprocity with Ptolemy and his finance minister Apollonius.

## ii. Jewish Funerary Inscriptions and Synagogue Names

Another body of evidence is found within Jewish funerary inscriptions. There are several examples of tombs paid for by Jewish patrons, which we know because they say “erected by the patron.”<sup>75</sup> In some inscriptions the name of the deceased person’s synagogue is named. The synagogues of Rome are named after the leaders of the time in which they were built, for example the synagogues of Augustus, Agrippa, and Volumnius.<sup>76</sup> This naming practice reflects efforts by the Roman Jewish community to express gratitude in a solidarity gesture which formed part of the reciprocal outlook of “loyalty for service” or even for good rule. These examples date from the late first century B.C.E. to the early first century C.E.

Although these inscriptions are slightly later than Ben Sira, they are interesting to reflect

<sup>75</sup> For the following inscriptions see M.H. Williams, *The Jews among the Greeks and Romans: A Diasporan Sourcebook* (London: Duckworth, 1998), 150. Jewish clients of Rome: VI.31 Jewish community conspicuously mourned Julius Caesar (Suet. *Julius* 84.5) - implying they felt indebted to him; VI.32 Libanius had a Jewish client called Theomnestos and they exchanged favours (Lib. *Epistulae* 1097). Inscriptions which mention provision of burial places by Jewish patrons: VI.36 from Ostia (CIJ I 533 = JIWE I 18, 2nd century C.E.); VI.37 Rufina, Jewess and *archisynagogos*, built for her freedmen and slaves, CIJ II.741 = IK Smyrna 295, dates to no earlier than third century C.E.; VI.38 a tomb for Niketas, the proselyte, set up by Dionysias, his patroness (*patrona*), CIJ I 256 = JIWE II 218, third or fourth centuries C.E., Rome; VI.39 Felicitas a proselyte, by her patron (*patronus*) unnamed CIJ I<sup>2</sup> 462 = JIWE II 62, dates to third or fourth centuries C.E., Rome. CIJ: J.-B. Frey, ed., *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum* (2 vols.; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1936). JIWE: D. Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe* (2 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). IK Smyrna: G. Petzl, *Die Inschriften von Smyrna* (2 vols.; Inschriften Städte aus Kleinasien 24; Bonn: Habelt, 1987).

<sup>76</sup> Richardson, *Herod*, 267-68. Synagogues in Rome were named after emperors such as Augustus, Agrippa, Volumnius (procurator of Syria from 9 to 7 B.C.E.). Augustan: CIJ I 284, 301, 338, 368, 416, 496; Agrippan: CIJ I 365, 425, 503; Volumnian: CIJ I 343, 402, 417, 523. There is also a Roman synagogue of the “Herodians,” which can also be interpreted as “Herod,” but Herodians would make more sense grammatically ([— — συννα]γωγης | [— — —] Ἡροδίων | [— — —] εὐλογία πᾶσι). For this inscription see CIJ I 173 (= JIWE II 292), cf. similar Jerusalem synagogue inscription dating to the first century B.C.E. to first century C.E. (CIIP I 9). The names reflect the “strong sense of obligation” the communities felt towards rulers “communal thanks to the honoree.” In other words, naming was not for monetary support but for thanks. CIIP: H. Cotton, ed., *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae: A Multi-Lingual Corpus of the Inscriptions from Alexander to Muhammad* (3 vols.; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010).



upon as examples of the use of patronage within a Jewish setting in antiquity, not too long after Ben Sira. Some of the evidence might indicate a longer standing tradition, such as in the case of naming synagogues after patrons and rulers. The arguments of cultural analogy are justified in these contexts given cultural continuity, chronological nearness, and geographic proximity.

One of the Jewish patrons is Rufina, an *archisynagogos*, who built a tomb for her freedmen and slaves:

ΡΟΥΦΕΙΝΑ ΙΟΥΔΑΙΑ ΑΡΧΙ  
 ΣΥΝΑΓΩΓΗΣ ΚΑΤΕΣΚΕΥΑ  
 ΣΕΝ ΤΟ ΕΝΣΟΡΙΟΝ ΤΟΙΣ ΑΠΕ  
 ΛΕΥΘΕΡΟΙΣ ΚΑΙ ΘΡΕΜΑΣΙΝ  
 ΜΗΔΕΝΟΣ ΑΛΟΣ ΕΞΟΥΣΙΑΝ Ε  
 ΧΟΝΤΟΣ ΘΑΨΑΙ ΤΙΝΑ ΕΙΔΕ ΤΙΣ ΤΟΛ  
 ΜΗΣΕΙ ΔΩΣΕΙ ΤΩ ΙΕΡΩΤΑΤΩ ΤΑ  
 ΜΕΙΩ \*ΑΦ ΚΑΙ ΤΩ ΕΘΝΕΙ ΤΩΝ ΙΟΥ  
 ΔΑΙΩΝ \*Α ΤΑΥΤΗΣ ΤΗΣ ΕΠΙΓΡΑΦΗΣ  
 ΤΟ ΑΝΤΙΓΡΑΦΟΝ ΑΠΟΚΕΙΤΑΙ  
 ΕΙΣ ΤΟ ΑΡΧΕΙΟΝ

Rufina, Jewess and *archisynagogos*, has built the tomb for her freedmen and house-born slaves. No one else has the right to bury anyone else (in it). If anyone dares to do

so, he shall give to the most holy treasury 1500 denarii and 1000 to the *ethnos* of the Jews. A copy of this inscription has been deposited in the record office.<sup>77</sup>

Shorter but no less interesting are three inscriptions from Italy which date to the third to fourth centuries C.E. One of these is for Niketas, a Jewish proselyte, whose patroness also set up a tomb for him:

NIKETE·PROSELYTO | DIGNO ET BENEMERENTI | DIONYSIAS · PATRONA  
FECIT

For Niketas, the proselyte, a worthy and well-deserving man, Dionysias, his patroness, has set up (this tomb).<sup>78</sup>

From these inscriptions it becomes clear that the Jewish people in the Mediterranean were very much integrated within the contemporary system of reciprocity to the extent of well-established, and well-recognised, individual patronage. While the topic of Roman death and burial of patronized individuals is too great to include here, the Jewish practice of recording patrons on epitaphs does not appear to differ greatly from Roman practices.<sup>79</sup>

### *iii. Herod the Great*

<sup>77</sup> Transcriptions and translations of all inscriptions are taken from Frey (CIJ). CIJ II.741 (= IK Smyrna 295) is no earlier than third century C.E., Jerusalem.

<sup>78</sup> CIJ I.256 (= JIWE II 218), which is third or fourth century C.E., Vigna Randanini catacomb, Via Appia. The other two inscriptions are cited in the above note.

<sup>79</sup> For a discussion of patronage in Roman burial, see J.R. Patterson, "Patronage, Collegia and Burial in Imperial Rome," in *Death in Towns: Urban Responses to the Dying and the Dead, 100-1600* (ed. Steven Bassett; Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992), 15-27. For Roman death and burial in general, see the comprehensive study by Toynbee: Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World*.

Herod the Great, explicitly a *client*-king of Rome, is a slightly later but no less interesting example. Peter Richardson writes that patronage is the “dominant motif” in why (and how) Herod built many fortresses, palaces, cities, and patronized projects in cities in his own kingdom and abroad, including the Olympic Games.<sup>80</sup> Herod’s own actions concerning Rome suit the patron-client relationship demanded by Roman emperors: Herod would lend soldiers and ships to Rome for their battles, as he does in the First and Second Nabatean Wars, and in exchange Rome would help support public projects that enable Herod to keep peace in his own land and ensure loyalty.<sup>81</sup>

#### *iv. The Letter of Aristeas*

The next comparative example comes from the Letter of Aristeas, whose historical accuracy and time of composition is a point of debate.<sup>82</sup> One particular detail of this text, however, becomes curious when compared to contemporary practices of patronage. This detail comes from lines §304-305, which read that the Jewish translators visited the king daily at his court.

And the session lasted until the ninth hour; after this they were set free to minister to their physical needs. Everything they wanted was furnished for them on a lavish scale. In addition to this Dorotheus made the same preparations for them daily as were made for the king himself – for thus he had

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<sup>80</sup> Richardson, *Herod*, 192-95.

<sup>81</sup> Richardson, *Herod*, 3.

<sup>82</sup> For a recent discussion see B.G. Wright, *The Letter of Aristeas, “Aristeas to Philocrates” or “On the Translation of the Law of the Jews”* (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2015); See also Tessa Rajak for the likelihood of patronage necessary for such a large translation project as the Pentateuch: T. Rajak, *Translation and Survival: The Greek Bible of the Ancient Jewish Diaspora* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

been commanded by the king. In the early morning they appeared daily at the Court, and after saluting the king went back to their own place.<sup>83</sup>

In fact, for Roman era patronage, which owed a great deal to the model of Greek practice, it remained an integral practice for any client to pay a daily call to his or her patron in the morning. Horace toys with this in one of his Satires (2.6), imagining Maecenas joking to him, “These frosty mornings will chill you if you’re not careful.”<sup>84</sup> It remains a point of interest that Judean sages are depicted in a Ptolemaic court offering daily obeisance to the king.

v. *1 Macc 12:1-23*

1 Maccabees reveals some information about the renewal of friendships of the Maccabeans with the Romans and the Spartans. Jonathan travels to the senate house in Rome to renew the contract of friendship and alliance (1 Macc 12:1-4). Then two letters are recorded which call to mind Judea’s former friendships with the Spartans (1 Macc 12:5-18; 19-23). The inference is that Sparta and Rome are both called upon to honour their past friendships with Judea by a renewal of mutual obligation and benefaction. Such actions are relationships of reciprocity on a large scale. Although 1 Maccabees is later than Ben Sira, the episode here is still an interesting example of well-established cultural language of friendship and reciprocity at work in Second Temple Judaism.

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<sup>83</sup> This translation is from Charles’ translation of Aristeas. For an English text of Aristeas, see R.H. Charles, ed., *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (2 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1913), 2:83-122.

<sup>84</sup> Horace *Satires* 2.6. Bowditch, *Horace*, 24. Bowditch lists morning salutation/attendance as a possible requirement of patronage. Wallace-Hadrill writes that clients were expected to be visible in the atrium of their patron. Wallace-Hadrill, *Patronage in Ancient Society*, 66, 82-83.

## Conclusions

What then, to make of the exuberant depiction of Simon in Ben Sira's book, regardless of whether we can attribute to Sir 44-50 (or Sir 50) the appellations of eulogy or encomium? After considering Ben Sira's text, wider Greek and Roman practices of patronage, and examples of reciprocity in Second Temple Judaism, the impression becomes clear that reciprocity was important to Ben Sira and his contemporary world. While we cannot present a definitive theorem concerning the setting for Ben Sira's composition within a context of patronage, the system of ancient reciprocity and patronage does cast a new light on the text and context of Ben Sira as a whole. It has been shown that there are more problems created than resolved in understanding Sir 50 as a eulogy, and that even in the loosest sense, there are problems with the assumption that Simon must be deceased at the time of Ben Sira's writing. I have shown that there are more possibilities within the text than have been put forward. It might be reasonably suggested that, in praising Simon so highly, Ben Sira acted with careful thought and deliberation, mindful of the nuances implied by such explicit praise, and that clues for such intention are found by his opinions on social relationships throughout his text. The arguments for Sir 50 being a eulogy are not strong enough considering it distinctly lacks any mention of death or lament. Rather, the celebratory features of this poem, as well as the importance of reciprocity in the rest of Ben Sira's text, mark for us the outline of a reciprocal relationship with a living patron.

With this, a slightly earlier dating can be put forward for most of Ben Sira's text, with a *terminus ad quem* of Simon's death around 195 B.C.E. or slightly later. Therefore, considering Simon's building works mentioned, completed around 198 B.C.E., a *terminus a quo* for at least Sir 50, if not the entire book, would be 198 B.C.E. or slightly after. Clearly, we must reconsider the theory that Simon needs to be dead at the time of the composition of

Sir 50, and the idea that death can be the only occasion for writing brings certain assumptions to the text and to any proposed relationship between Simon and Ben Sira. There is no particular reason, indeed, why in a roll-call of patriarchs, Simon need be mentioned—the choice of inclusion of this High Priest should attract our attention. I have demonstrated that there is considerable room for debate, and that the argument of Simon as dead is rather limiting as an interpretation of Ben Sira's text. I propose that seeing Simon as living at the time of Ben Sira's composition of (at least) Sir 50, and for the reasons covered in this study, as a probable patron of Ben Sira, would be a more fitting way of understanding why Simon is portrayed so positively in Ben Sira's book of wisdom.